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*The Reception of American Literature in Poland in the 19th Century*

Doctoral dissertation written under the supervision of prof. dr hab. Zygmunt Mazur

**SUMMARY**

The reception of foreign writers in the national culture is one of the classic topics in comparative studies. When writing about the reception of American literature in Poland, one should mention two works devoted to the reception of American literature as a whole, but limited by time frames. They are: *Reception of American prose in People's Poland in the years 1945–1965* by Jerzy Szkup, published in 1972 in Warsaw, and a publication by Teresa Kieniewicz, *Reception of American Literature in Poland in the Interwar Period*, published five years later. In the first case, the author defined his goals as collecting material and presenting direct contacts, information sources and transmissions. This work, mainly based on primary sources, is an introduction to the study of historical and typological analogies, as well as the dialectics of similarities and mutual influences. In the case of the latter work, the large amount of material meant that the comments on individual cases of reception were severely limited.

The remaining works are devoted to the reception of a selected American author. One can mention here a monographic sketch by Franciszek Lyra, entitled *Edgar Allan Poe*, published in Warsaw in 1973. In it, Lyra deals with the issue of Poe's reception in Poland, noting at the beginning that “[it] is such a complex issue that it deserves a more extensive study than one chapter in the monograph.” In recent years, a dozen more works have appeared focusing on selected artists. These include Paweł Jędrzejko and his works on Herman Melville, published in the years 2007-2011, Marta Skwara and her research on American transcendentalism and more specifically Walt Whitman, and Mirosława Ziaja-Buchholtz, who deals with the reception of Henry James' works.

The reception of a foreign writer is a heterogeneous phenomenon that encompasses many areas. Therefore, it may be tempting to list specific groups of methodologies aimed at specific mechanisms: literary reception and communication, as well as translation and intertextuality, generally understood as the way American authors influence Polish literature.

In my doctoral dissertation, *The Reception of American Literature in Poland in the 19th Century*, I focus on the analysis of the functioning of American literature in the Polish lands of the 19th century on the basis of available source materials. I also try to answer the following questions: whose writings, when and why were translated? Why were some authors translated more than others? What could have influenced this? Why were some authors not translated at all? How were the translated works received by critics and readers?

In the course of library research, I found out that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, works authored by or concerning 33 leading American authors of that period were published in Polish in the form of books or critical articles, reviews, biographies and other materials of scholarly interest. Because of the volume and quality of the collected material, I have divided it into two groups. The first group includes writers characterized by a strong presence in the literary space of 19th-century Polish lands. They are Benjamin Franklin, Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Edgar Allan Poe, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Thomas Mayne Reid, Walt Whitman, Mark Twain, Bret Harte and Edward Bellamy. The second group, characterized by a modest number of publications in Poland in the 19th century, include: Charles Brockden Brown, William Cullen Bryant, Nathaniel Hawthorne, John Greenleaf Whittier, John Porter Brown, William Wells Brown, Herman Melville, James Russell Lowell, Richard Henry Stoddard, Rose Terry Cooke, Maria Susanna Cummins, Lewis Wallace, Helen Hunt Jackson, Louisa May Alcott, Susan Coolidge, Henry James, George Washington Cable, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Jeanie Gould, Anna Katharine Green, and Edwin Wiley Fuller.

The first, main group of American authors is analyzed in detail and described in individual subsections of chapter one. In the case of each author, I present the part of his literary output that was translated into Polish or commented on in Polish-language press publications. Much emphasis was placed on identifying the authors of translations, critical articles, reviews, summaries, CVs and other texts devoted to American authors. In many cases, such data could not be obtained, which was largely due to the specific situation of Poland under the partitions. The anonymization of the authors may have resulted from the desire to conceal their true identity for fear of possible reprisals. In a few cases, little known but interesting episodes regarding Polish-American contacts were discovered, for example the meeting of Princess Izabela Czartoryska with Benjamin Franklin, the friendship and frequent meetings in the United States of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow with the Polish actress Helena Modrzejewska, or the meeting of Longfellow with the Polish traveler and reporter Sygurd Wiśniowski.

The second chapter presents those authors whose work was characterized by a small number of translations into Polish or articles in Polish magazines. A similar mechanism was used as in the first chapter, i.e. all the publications concerning these authors that appeared in Poland in the 19th century have been listed and described in detail.

Finally, I draw attention to some statistical data resulting directly from the collected research material. It was found that three writers provided almost half of all Polish editions of the analyzed period. The most frequently published writer was Thomas Mayne Reid, with 24 stories. James Fenimore Cooper comes in second, with 19 novels published in Polish, while the third place is taken by Harriet Beecher Stowe, with one publication less. Response to book publications varied, and often there was none at all. In general, the authors of abstracts and reviews, even if they had critical comments, usually tried to put them in subdued words and finally give their texts a positive overtone. The most criticized element was the quality of the translation, while no major comments were made regarding the content of the works.

An analysis of the published information on American authors, as well as the reviews of their works, made it possible to identify important factors influencing the popularity of American literature in Poland. These were: the presence of attractive role models, such as the figure of the honest hero, a courageous and devoted patriot to his homeland, and the way of perceiving the nationality of the authors. The Americans appeared to Polish readers as free and happy people who gained independence thanks to their persistence and victorious military confrontation with a powerful enemy. Their country, in the eyes of Poles, represented an oasis of democracy and a promised land for a nation oppressed by partitions, which suggests that American literature had escapist values.

An important element of the dissertation is the bibliography of translations, which includes publications listed by author, i.e., a complete list of all Polish translations of American literature in the 19th century. Another important component is the list of collected data, including a bibliography of articles, translations and other information contained in magazines published in Polish lands in the 19th century, a list of journals containing information related to the reception of American literature, and a list of book editions sorted by individual writers and by place of publication.

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